

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

AN ITALIAN PHILOSOPHER.

VICO, By ROBERT FLINT. Printed in the University of Edinburgh. (Philosophical Classics for English Readers.) Ed. by William Knight, LL.D. £1.00. London, pp. 232. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co.; Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons.

The name of Giambattista Vico is not familiar to English readers, and will not be found very often even in the pages of English philosophers, while in Germany it is even less known than it is in England and America. Vico, however, was a writer and thinker of profound genius who has excised, and is still exercising, a great influence upon Italian philosophical speculation and through that upon the general progress of ideas. For a hundred years he has been reverently studied in his own country, and in the present century especially he has had enthusiastic followers, the favor with which he is regarded in Italy being attributable in great part to National feeling. Vico is regarded as "a powerful living force in the great Italian awakening which this age has witnessed"; and yet some critics have denounced his philosophy as an antiquated and obsolete system constructed in the interests of the church. With this unfavorable judgment Professor Flint does not hold. Vico was emphatically a Christian philosopher, and a Roman Catholic philosopher. He was a man of pure life, sincere piety, and strong religious convictions; the doctrines of divine Providence, of immortality, of the necessity of the Christian scheme of morals for the regulation of human life, are fundamental parts of his system; he was careful to affirm that his doctrines were in harmony with the teachings of the church, and he regarded Lutheranism and Calvinism as inconsistent with a philosophy which would satisfy the general reason of mankind. But Professor Flint remarks that nowhere in his works has he introduced the distinctive doctrines of Roman Catholicism; and he conjectures that in committing himself only to the assertion of a few fundamental religious principles involved in the common faith of humanity, Vico wished "to avoid if possible affording any occasion or pretext for accusations of heresy." This, however, appears to be a gratuitous and useless supposition. There is no ground for suspecting the entire sincerity of Vico's acceptance of the faith which he professed. His philosophy made no use of theological data, but proceeded in part of its own. It was not even founded upon Christianity, observes Professor Flint, and Christianity furnished but little of the material employed in its construction. If Christian doctrines found a conspicuous place in it, they were not derived from theological authority but from the common sense of humanity, from Plato and Cicero as well as from the Bible. This being the case, it seems to us entirely unnecessary to assume that Vico may have cherished some *arrivee pensee* of theological dissent which he feared to express.

The great work of Vico is the "Scienza Nuova," the "New Science"; and the fundamental thought of that treatise is referable to the conviction that the entire history of mankind is but the eternal idea of that history which existed in the divine mind realized and manifested in actual events. The true philosophy of history lay in the divine ideal. The New Science is essentially a vindication of the character and wisdom of God. But in tracing the divine in history Vico did not lose sight of the human. The plan of history is a plan which God has ordained and which man realizes; and since the divine plan has been realized through the faculties of human nature, its character can only be ascertained by a profound and comprehensive study of the various phases of human development. The New Science, therefore, is both a theology and a sociology, but the two are distinct and independent. The Absolute Reason moves all history from within, but moves it by the human factors which compose it. The philosophy of history must be based on the knowledge of human nature. Professor Flint devolves the statement of Vico's position with admirable clearness, and presents not only a distinct and satisfactory resume of the leading ideas of his principal treatise, but a complete explanation of his position with regard to other thinkers, and his true place in the history of philosophy. In the survey of the "Scienza Nuova," as well as of Vico's other writings, Professor Flint shows an acute perception alike of the merits and the defects of the Italian philosopher, and indicates very clearly the many particulars in which he anticipated modern investigators. The range of Vico's genius, he says, "was not universal. Vico was no Aristotle or Leibniz. He was but a sorry mathematician. He obviously knew very little about any department of physical science. He was not a great metaphysician. His strength lay in those departments of knowledge which relate to the workings of the mind and to the moral and political relationships and history of man. It is in connection with comparative and applied psychology, with physiology, with mythology, with jurisprudence, with literary history, and with the philosophy of history, that his name will be remembered; but in this connection his comprehensiveness and his profundity were alike admirable. Over the whole of this vast territory, although many of its provinces were almost unknown in his time, his mind had ranged, inquired, and theorized, in such a way that many of the conclusions at which he arrived have been found in a multitude of cases to have been most wonderful anticipations of theories which have been established, or which have been rendered popular, only within the present century."

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